February 9, 2021

I am submitting this letter in support of LD 184: An Act to Minimize the Propagation of Invasive Aquatic Plants. As 20+ year owners of property on Stearns Pond in Sweden, Maine my family has a vested interest in preserving and protecting this water resource which over the period of our ownership has not been afflicted with invasive waterborne plants, mussels or fish species.

As a youngster growing up in Western New York in the 1960's and 1970's I spend my summers at our parent's cottage on Keuka Lake, one of the fabled "Finger Lakes". In those decades, Keuka Lake was a pristine waterway much like many lakes in Maine. The flora and fauna in and around the Lake had remained undisturbed (other than human development) for 1000's of years. In the late 1990's and 2000's however, zebra mussels found their way into Keuka Lake and many of the other Finger Lakes. The origin of these invaders has been much debated. As there is no connectivity among all of the Finger Lakes to the Great Lakes where zebra mussels were first introduced, conventional wisdom is that fishermen and recreational boaters unwittingly brought hitchhiking zebra mussels from the Great Lakes into the Finger Lakes Region. Their propagation was immediate, prolific and destructive in many ways.

As detailed in his 2017 NY Times bestselling book *The Death and Life of the Great Lakes*, Dan Egan aptly describes the impact of the zebra mussel introduction into the Great Lakes from the ballast of European freighters in Chapter 4 (Noxious Cargo: The Invasion of Zebra and Quagga Mussels @ page 121):

"The North American zebra mussel problem was made worse by the fact that they have no worthy predators in the Great Lakes, and in the most heavily infested areas, they soon began to cluster atop each other like gnarled coral at densities exceeding 100,000 per square meter. Each adult mussel, which typically grows no bigger than a nickel, can filter up to a liter of water per day, sequestering inside its hard little shell all the nutrients within the water."

I have witnessed these infestations first hand on lake bottoms, intake pipes, piers and docks and while filter feeding zebra mussels do remarkably clarify the water, it is with a steep price. Such filter feeding decimates the very bottom of the food chain as they exhaust a lake's nutrient base and plankton. In addition, their razor sharp edges make wading impossible without foot protection ---not a good situation for the many summer camps along Maine's lakes. Quagga mussels, first found in Lake Erie in 1989, are an even more insidious menace, living at depths up to 500', not needing a hard surface to attach to and filtering water year-round.

Given these considerations, it is imperative that Maine's legislature endeavor to protect the state's lakes from destructive invasives. Although not a perfect solution, LD 184 is a big step in the right direction.

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